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Only CIA Believed Uranium Diverted

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Documents released yesterday by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission show that the Central Intelligence Agency stood alone in a belief that uranium that disappeared from a factory in Pennsylvania more than 10 years ago may have been diverted to Israel.

The documents show that the CIA was at odds with at least four other federal agencies that investigated whether a diversion took place: the FBI, the National Security Council of the White House, the Energy Research and Development Administration (now part of the Department of Energy) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission itself.

These are the conclusions of a 550-page report by the NRC, which published it over the weekend in response to charges that it had not told Congress all the facts involved in the loss of 206 pounds of weapons-grade uranium that disappeared from a factory in Apollo, Pa., in the mid-1960s.

The charges go back two years ago to secret briefings given by the CIA to the federal agencies involved with the uranium and to the National Security Council. The CIA told the agencies it suspected the uranium had been smuggled out of Pennsylvania to Israel because it disappeared at about the same time the CIA felt it had evidence that Israel had an atomic bomb.

"While the picture that emerges from these CIA briefings is somewhat blurred," the NRC report said, "most of the (people at the CIA briefings) came away feeling the results were inconclusive... Some believed the CIA briefing official was expressing his own theories on what happened. One said he listened for hard evidence but all he heard were theories, circumstantial evidence and much color."

In its report, the NRC says it may have misled Congress by stating unequivocally it had "no evidence" that a diversion had occurred. Specifically, the NRC report says that NRC Executive Operations Director Lee V. Gossick "testified incorrectly" to Congress last August that the entire commission believed there was no evidence of diversion.

"Mr. Gossick has admitted that he should have limited his testimony" to the period that followed 1968 "or by adjectives such as conclusive or hard," the NRC report said. "We agree that Mr. Gossick should have limited his testimony to the period" after 1968 "or used adjectives such as 'conclusive' or 'hard.'"

Nevertheless, the NRC points out that Gossick may have been misled about the CIA's position. The report points out that Gossick was not invited to the CIA briefings for the NRC commissioners and was only told of the CIA's suspicions indirectly by NRC officials who were briefed by CIA.

In its discussion of the still-secret suspicions the CIA had about the uranium, the NRC points out that no other federal agency shared them—even after hearing the CIA's views on it.

The CIA briefing was first given to the NRC by Carl Duckett, then director of CIA's Office of Science and Technology. Duckett also briefed the FBI, ERDA and the National Security Council. Early in 1976, about the same time he gave the briefings, Duckett announced at a meeting of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics that the CIA had evidence that Israel possessed nuclear weapons.

Duckett is now retired from the CIA, having been replaced in his post by Leslie Dirks. Since his retirement, Duckett has briefed several committees of Congress about his belief that Israel built its atomic bombs at least in part with uranium smuggled out of the factory in Apollo.

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Then-NRC Chairman William Anders "said he took what the briefing official said with a grain of salt," the NRC report said of Duckett's suspicions, "and wondered if he was on sort of a personal crusade." Anders was also quoted as saying that the "style and ambiance" of Duckett's presentation "raised questions as to the accuracy and objectivity of the information" Duckett said he had.

The NRC report quotes Carl Builder, former NRC director of safeguards and now a staff member of the Rand Corp. as saying this about Duckett's briefing: "The briefer seemed to be the advocate of theories that did not have the support of his agency."

Duckett's briefing of officials at the old Energy Research and Development Administration raised the same questions, the NRC report said, pointing out that the CIA never issued any report of the suspicions Duckett said the agency had about the uranium.

"If there is a CIA report, I have not seen it," said Gen. Edward B. Giller, onetime deputy assistant administrator for national security at ERDA. Giller's supervisor was Gen. Albert D. Starbird, who said: "My answer is the same as Ed's."

Duckett said it was possible the uranium was smuggled out of Apollo with the help of Zalman Shapiro, president of the company that owned the factory and a man who had business interests in Israel. The NRC report points out that the CIA made the NRC more aware of a possible threat from within the nation's uranium factories.

"The safeguards approach was to consider in depth the possibility of a gang of russians who could surround the plant," onetime NRC General Counsel Peter Strauss is quoted as saying. "The possibility of conspiracy to embezzle at high corporate levels was the most difficult to generate mechanical solutions for. And so the problem tended to be wished away."